

Religion in US Politics and the Rise of Evangelicals

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Abstract

The study attempts to examine the role of religion in US politics and explains the origin and history of Evangelicals (a Protestant Christian Movement) and their influence on US domestic and foreign policy with particular emphasis on Evangelicalism in the post 9/11 period. One aspect of looking at the War on Terror (WoT) in the post 9/11 wars is to see it whether it is a war between Evangelicals and the Muslim world or not. Therefore, it is important to understand Evangelicalism and its meaning and then find its effects on US policies at home and abroad particularly in Bush presidency. They study also explores Islamophobia and Evangelicals religious association with Israel.

Key Words: Religion, US Foreign Policy, Evangelicals, Israel, Islamophobia, Christian Zionism, IRFA, Neo - Conservatives.

There is no shortage of disagreement in scholarship negating the impact of religion on US policymaking. Nevertheless, the acknowledgment of influence of religion in politics remains largely undiminished. To begin with, the US history reveals that religion has had a significant influence on US public and political life since the early colonial times when German and English settlers came to America in search of religious freedom.

Scholars have responded in a number of ways about religion's role in US politics. It is important to note that American public life is neither wholly secular nor wholly religious but an increasingly changing mix of the two. History shows that trouble tended to come when one of these forces grew too powerful in proportion to the other,¹ and the trends in US foreign policy, on most occasions, clearly show this tendency.

Patrick Henry presents the counter argument; 'it cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded not only by religionists but by Christians, not on religions but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ'.² This point is also sustained by James Bryce, an intellectual of the British Liberal Party in 1880 that clergymen were the first influential citizens in the US. They not only had authority in churches but also emphasized on the moral reformation of the society. They slowly enlarged their sphere of influence beyond their churches; so much that in 1900, around 650 full-time and 2200 part-time Evangelists were touring the country.³

Other scholars, claiming that American religiosity was too vigorous a force to be kept within its limits, support the above arguments. The US foreign policy was never beyond the reach of religious influence.⁴

Meaning of the Term Evangelical:

Before considering the role of religion in US politics and foreign policy, it is important to understand the term Evangelicals. The term has its roots from the Greek word 'Euangelion'

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meaning Gospel or good news of Christ. In addition, Evangelicals stress on the authority of Bible.

According to Parrinder:

"Evangelical is a term applied to Protestant Reformers from their claim to base doctrines on the Gospel. The Lutheran Church in Germany is called the Evangelical Church. Since the Methodist Movement in the 18th century, the term was applied to those who laid emphasis on conversion, experience, 'evangelism' and mission. In the nineteenth century, Evangelicals were Low Church as opposed to Anglo-Catholics and High Church. In the twentieth century, unlike liberals or modernists, Evangelicals frequently made a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible."⁵

Evangelicals themselves claim to be the people of Gospel who accept the Apostles' Creed and are dedicated to New Testament Christianity.⁶ They emphasize on the prospect for moral progress but they also believe in cooperation with non-believers in social welfare works, even though they consider that those who reject Christ shall not be united with God after death.⁷

In the past and even today, especially in the Continental Europe and Latin America, all Protestants have been referred to as Evangelicals. However, Evangelicals are the moderates, less strident and more accommodative heirs of fundamentalist Protestants.⁸ Timothy states that the term Evangelicalism is synonymous with Protestantism.⁹ Zakaullah, however, has rejected the view, while explaining that all Evangelicals are Protestants and can belong to one or another Protestant denomination or mainline church but every Protestant is not an Evangelical.¹⁰

Despite these descriptions, however, the primary source to understand Evangelicalism is the Evangelical Manifesto, which states that:

"There are three major mandates for Evangelicals. The first one is that Evangelicals are Christians who define themselves, their faith and their lives according to the Good News of Jesus of Nazareth. Moreover, Evangelicals should be defined theologically, and not politically, socially or culturally. The purpose of Evangelicals is not to attack or to exclude but to remind and to reaffirm, and so to rally and to reform... For Evangelicals, it is the defining imperative and supreme goal of all who would follow the way of Jesus... Evangelicals do not typically lead with the name Evangelical in public. They are simply Christians, or followers of Jesus, or adherents of 'mere Christianity,' but the Evangelical principle is at the heart of how they see and live with their faith."¹¹

Furthermore, the English historian David Babington identifies the following four key characteristics of Evangelicalism:

"Biblicalism, (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority); Conversionism, (a stress on the New Birth or being Born Again); Activism, (an energetic, individualistic approach to religious

duties and social involvement); Crucicentrism, (a focus on Christ's redeeming work as the heart of essential Christianity).¹²

Other studies suggest that the use of the term Evangelical differs among Evangelicals themselves. 'Some Evangelicals claim this to indicate their status as true Christians, reflecting various other religious groups that subscribe to hierarchies of belonging. Whereas, some use it to signify their heritage of being independent from the Orthodox Catholic, and even mainline Protestant churches. It is also important to note that the term is also often used in negative context by non-Evangelicals, meaning that Evangelicals express religious value in the realm of politics.'¹³ This is a general belief that Evangelicals share same views on political and social issues. However, Seiple's discourse is, 'for Evangelicals, one should not create a category that suggests that all Evangelicals think the same way.'¹⁴

Noting the above definitions, it is important not to assume that, 'the experience that most Evangelicals passed through formed a new religion because it sustains British Protestant beliefs, practices and moral requirements'.¹⁵ Fundamentalists, Liberal Christians and Evangelicals are all part of the historical mainstream Protestantism and all were affected by the early eighteenth century fundamentalist-modernist controversy.¹⁶

Presently, the term Evangelicalism is used in three senses. Firstly, to view Evangelicals as all Christians, who affirm a few key doctrines and practical emphases. Secondly, Evangelicalism is to be regarded as an organic group of movements and religious tradition. Taken in this context, Evangelicalism is as diverse as Black Baptists and Dutch Reform Churches, Mennonites and Pentecostals, Catholic Charismatic and Southern Baptists all come under the Evangelical umbrella. A third sense of the term is a self-ascribed label for a coalition that arose during the Second World War. This group came into being as a reaction to the fundamentalist movements in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁷

Role of Religion in US Politics:

Alexis de Tocqueville recognized the role of religion in shaping American culture as:

"This civilization is the result...of two distinct ingredients, which anywhere else have often ended in war but Americans have succeeded somehow to meld together in wondrous harmony; namely the spirit of religion and the spirit of liberty."¹⁸

On the other hand critics of religion's intercession with politics in the US point to the US Constitution that strongly upholds a separation between the Church and the State. This argument manifests in Article 6 of the Constitution, which says that religion will not be a qualification for holding any public office.¹⁹ Of central significance is the First Amendment which declares, 'Congress shall make no law respecting an established religion, or prohibiting the free exercise.' This was because the founding fathers wanted to avoid the vices associated with the established European church. This interpretation, however, did not mean to take religion out of the public life but to make it a personal individual undertaking rather than statecraft.²⁰

A further point to be considered is the concept of secularism in the Constitution, which has faced challenges in the past from staunch Evangelicals like Pat Robertson and William Rehnquist, former Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court, (1994 to 2005), and the Southern Baptist Convention leaders who declared it wrong.²¹

The above argument is supported by the evidence that for more than two centuries, the US has served as a unique laboratory for the emergence of new religious groups and movements, partially because of its history and partially because of its size.²² Being conscious of its self-righteousness, the US considers itself a ‘Chosen Nation’. The following framework would help in understanding Protestant Millennialism in the US politics, where in each period a mission was set up against an adversary. It also shows how Americans approached their objectives and the obstacles in the way of their attainment with a religious mentality.

Table – 1
Protestant Millennialism in the US Politics

Period	Mission	Adversary	Means
Pre-revolutionary Colonial America (1600-1776)	Millennium	Papal Antichrist	Example as “city on the hill”
Revolutionary and Founding Era (1776-1815)	Empire of Liberty	Old world tyranny, Hellish fiends’ (Native Americans)	Example, continental expansion without entangling alliances
Manifest Destiny (1815-1848)	Christian Civilization	Savages or “children” (Native Americans)	Example, continental expansion without entangling alliances
Imperial America (1898-1913)	Christian Civilization	Barbarians and savages (Filipinos)	Overseas Expansion without entangling alliances
Wilsonian Internationalism (1914-1919)	Global Democracy	Autocracy and Imperialism	International organizations and alliances
Cold War Liberalism (1946-1989)	Free world	Communism	International organizations and alliances
Bush and Neo-Conservatism (2001-2008)	Spread of Freedom	International terrorism, radical Islam	Unilateral action with ad-hoc alliances

Source: Policy Brief, CEIP, Washington DC.

The prerevolutionary colonial Americans believed that a struggle against the English tyranny and Catholicism would begin a thousand years before the ‘End Time’. The second phase is characterized by the effort to guard its liberty against the tyranny of the European ‘Old World’ and got territorial expansion. Its third phase starts with the ‘Manifest Destiny’ to bring civilization and Christianity to the Native Americans, but the natives were expelled from the Black Hills and Texas was occupied. The fourth phase commences with the development of the process of American Imperialism in Philippine but blended in religious colors as if the savages and barbarian Filipinos ought to be Christianized. President Thomas Woodrow Wilson, while extending his support to the League of Nations in 1919, said that the US would lead in the ‘redemption of the world’. In addition, during World War II, Franklin Dwight Roosevelt declared in his 1942 message to the Congress: ‘We, on our side, are striving to be true to (our) divine heritage’.²³

The religious motivation of the leadership in US foreign policy brought them closer to the Religious Right and vice versa. This argument, sustained by scholars, suggests that Bush also did not differ from his predecessors in his commitment to Protestant Millennialism. He rejected working with the United Nations as his strategy was based on unilateralism.²⁴ Kevin Phillips, a defector Republican, termed the US as a high technology, Gospel spreading super power. Similarly, a British writer Jonathan Raban stated that the US, as the greatest military power in history, had shackled its deadly hardware to the rhetoric of fundamentalist Christianity.²⁵

It is interesting to note that the links between Evangelism, missionary work, diplomacy and imperialism became stronger as the century wore on. Americans felt they had all the qualities for colonizing and persistent energy to evangelize the world. It is argued that the missionaries helped to shape US relations with other countries.²⁶ Some studies suggest that the US has chosen to project its power overseas by sending American troops to lavish military bases built on foreign territories.²⁷ Several analysts deny religion's role in US foreign policy formulation and refer to economic, cultural and military factors behind the US approach to world affairs.

It is also argued that, 'three political forces are behind the US support for war: the oil lobby, the pro-Israel lobby, and the advantages of war for the purposes of domestic politics'.²⁸ However, examining the economic, political and cultural influences on the contemporary wave of imperialism, one cannot deny the role of religion as the former go into background because of the nature of war (such as the ongoing WoT) and its attribution to Muslims as a community.

Having considered the role of religion on US politics, it is also reasonable to look at the fact that the power balance in US shifted from Liberal Protestants to the Conservative Protestants and, hence, Protestants as a majority faith are having impact on US foreign policy. Catholicism is the second largest faith, along with other religious groups, but these are less influential in US politics. Fundamentalists were divided into separatists and Neo-Evangelicals who dropped the prefix and hence known as Evangelicals.²⁹

Evangelicals: Historical Perspective:

15th century saw Pope's authority in Europe, which resulted in the exploitation of religion by church officials. The subsequent discontentment from church paved the way for Reformation Movements.³⁰ During these movements, two theologians: a German, Martin Luther (1483-1546) and a French, John Calvin (1509-1564) challenged the church. Luther rejected the Church's claim of being the sole source of salvation and proposed 'priesthood of all believers' stating that every individual possessed the power claimed by priests. He also stressed that only the scriptures were free of errors and that an individual's faith was his guide³¹ By the same token, Calvin also confronted the Catholic Church.

Protestant Christianity underwent further changes following the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 and the reestablishment of English Monarchy in 1660. The religious factor in the change was spiritual renewal i.e., the objection to church and clergy domination and appeal for living religion of the heart. The 1720s and 1730s saw great upheavals in English speaking Protestantism following religious awakening led by George Whitefield, John Wesley and Jonathan Edward among many others.³²

During these upheavals, Evangelicalism started in Great Britain in 1730s and gained popularity in the US during 18th and 19th century.³³ In the US, from colonial era to the

middle of 19th century, Protestantism was the dominant faith. In 1790, Catholics were 01% of the American population and Jews even smaller in number. Majority of the populations, though not formally member of any denomination, were Protestants either in background or conviction and ethos of everyday life was Protestant.³⁴

In the early 20th century, Evangelical Protestants by and large supported dispensationalism. It stressed on the prediction of existing events by quoting prophecies in the Bible. For example, in the 1930s, Dispensationalists commonly identified Benito Mussolini dictator of Italy, as the Anti-Christ (a key evil figure in the book of Revelation in the Bible).³⁵

One of the important factors to note is that a significant principle of Evangelicalism is to 'proselytize' (i.e. conversion from one religion, belief or opinion to another). It is however, important to mention that there are two types of Evangelicalism: conversion of others and self-conversion. The phenomenon of conversion known as 'Born Again' lies at the heart of Evangelicalism. The conversion is not limited to ones own self but includes converting others, both Christians and non-Christians.³⁶

Another important aspect of Evangelicalism is to expedite the 'Second Coming of Christ', and for this to happen, the US missionaries regarded Muslims a hurdle in spreading the Gospel. Evidence for in support of this position can be found in many scholarly writings, which suggest that many organizations were active in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa during 1800s and 1900s to evangelize Jews, Muslims and nominal Christians. Of these, Muslims were considered as difficult to convert and seen as religious rivals for the religious conquest of the world. Their target in these areas was, first to evangelize the nominal Christians and then, through them, convert others.³⁷

Noting the compelling nature of these aspects of Evangelicalism, Zakaullah maintains that Christian fundamentalists' global agenda to establish the 'Kingdom of God' on earth is commitment to converting the masses in the third world Muslim countries. These are the fertile grounds for missionary activities organized through a vast network of church based non-governmental organizations, which send missionaries consisting of qualified professionals like health workers and teachers etc.³⁸

Until the early 1950s, a majority of the US Protestant missions in the Third World were from mainline denominations. However, by the late 1980s, 90% were Evangelicals. In 2005, the BBC's Focus on Africa reported that Africa is being colonized and Christianized all over again. But the colonizers this time are Americans, not Europeans, and the belief that they are bringing to Africa is Evangelical Christianity.³⁹

American Evangelicalism:

The Great Awakening was a religious revival in the US, inspired by the preaching of Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) and later by George Whitefield (1714-70). Jonathan Edwards preaching tours introduced two innovations that characterized the later Evangelical and fundamentalist movements. The first was the highly emotional style of preaching and the second was his preaching in churches of different denomination, other than his own, that would allow him to do so.⁴⁰

Majorities of the US Evangelicals trace their heritage back to the Protestant Reformation. After the World War II, Evangelicalism unified and revitalized conservative Protestantism in the US.⁴¹ Compared to Protestant Reformation, the US Evangelicalism was as different as Protestant Reformation and Medieval Catholicism.⁴² The focal point of American Evangelicals is celebrating and sharing of the good news of Christ's victory over death.⁴³

More importantly, Evangelical Protestantism is strangely modern religion in the US because among the Evangelicals, a born Christian is not adequate; one must be Born Again to meet the designation. Therefore, different Evangelical churches were suited to a quickly modernizing US.⁴⁴

The 16th century clashes between Protestants and Catholics caused the migration of the former from Europe to the US to avoid persecution. American society quickly absorbed them, as it was predominantly Protestant. As a consequence, ideas of self-discipline, hard work and personal salvation dominated the thoughts and actions of the American society.⁴⁵

From 1776 till 1850, a period of Second Great Awakening came with two developments in the US. The first was the 'forging of Evangelical America' because by 1860, Evangelicals were 85% of the total church going population in the US. The second development was the 'Americanization of religion' where Evangelicals created an American theology shaped by rejection of hierarchy and tradition. They were more committed to the Bible and the experience of Born Again. These two trends took place in a period of rapid change when two million Americans in 1776 became twenty three million in 1850. They established various institutions, spread their influence and because of their struggle, vices such as illegitimacy, drunkenness declined.⁴⁶

White Evangelical Protestants constituted the largest and most influential body of religious adherents in the US for a major part of the 19th century. Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregationalist and some Episcopalian shared broadly Evangelical convictions. During this era, Evangelicals were the strength of English speaking missionary activity and of many movements of social reforms at home and abroad.⁴⁷

1. Split within Evangelicals

It was in the 20th century that religion in the US underwent three setbacks that reduced its capability to resist secularism and modernism: The American Protestantism got split between Liberals and Fundamentals. The situation was worsened by the defeat of Fundamentalist Protestants against alcoholic drinks, Darwinian theory and finally, when political establishment embraced 'the Judeo-Christian tradition' as a symbol of Americanism after the Second World War.⁴⁸

Eventually, a divide appeared within Protestantism, with the Fundamentalists defending Orthodox Christianity and the Liberals promoting the Social Gospel. The Fundamentalists faced threats from industrialization, scientific discoveries and technological advancement besides Darwinism and Marxist socialism. The fundamentalists were not ready to accept a defeat despite their declining membership. They put pressure on a number of States in the US to pass anti - evolution laws.⁴⁹ It was on July 10, 1925 that the famous Scopes Trial brought embarrassment to Fundamentalists when a schoolteacher, John Thomas Scopes, was put on trial for teaching evolution in school at Dayton (Tennessee).⁵⁰

Subsequently, Evangelicals got together against the Liberals and from 1910 to 1915, wrote 12 pamphlets, 'The Fundamentals', for the defense of key doctrine under attack. The Modernists and Neo-Orthodox won the struggle from Fundamentalists for the control of major Protestant denominations and seminaries. Henceforth, many Fundamentalists left their denominations to form their own institutions and formed various fundamentalist associations from 1919 to 1947.⁵¹ In response to the Supreme Court ruling against racially segregated schools in 1954, they formed their own Christian Academies, where only white

children were accepted and were tax exempted. Moreover, various decisions of the Court against them added fuel to the frustration of fundamentalists.⁵²

2. Political Activism

Evangelicals realizing their intellectual poverty and lack in intellectual substance, started focusing on research and education and established their own schools. To deliver the message to the masses directly, radio and TV networks were established which increased the number of their audience.⁵³ Additionally, special attention was paid to strengthen and further develop the performance of vital institutions. One thing common among them was that they trained students to serve as teachers, ministers and missionaries. They found various universities and introduced many publications to establish the intellectual superiority.⁵⁴

It is important to note that 'younger leaders sought an intellectually responsible expression of their faith by reconnecting with theologically conservative mainline Protestants who had sought to hold back the theological modernism in their churches. The maturing immigrant communities, e.g., the Hollanders gradually integrated and offered American Evangelicals a heritage of serious academic work and experienced philosophical reasoning. The reconnection not only brought together several young talented Evangelicals but also became a model of political engagement for Evangelicals as a whole.'⁵⁵

After 1960, Evangelical leaders became politically active to save American society from the social and moral upheaval. Bernard (1999) in particular highlighted Billy Graham's role who drew national attention to Evangelistic Crusade in 1949 and asked for racial integration in Evangelical associations.⁵⁶ He was a spiritual advisor to many US presidents and obtained his first meeting with President Truman in 1950 and, later on, met Eisenhower, Johnson and Nixon to narrow the gap between Church and the State.⁵⁷ An important success for Evangelicals was during Eisenhower's administration in 1954 that the words 'Under God' were added to the pledges of allegiance to the flag of the US.⁵⁸

The Evangelical response to the 1973 Roe v Wade case (the Supreme Court case that, in effect, legalized abortion, and placed the power of decision in the Federal Government) marked the beginning of a new assertion in politics. Evangelical leaders led a movement, the 'Moral Majority' (MM) in a new wave of moral activism. MM is usually considered the first political manifestation of the Christian Right. The movement lobbied politicians and sent direct mailings to voters about issues such as abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment, homosexuality and media subversion of the family values and, in a more limited fashion, in debates over foreign policy issues, notably the Israeli-Palestinian situation.⁵⁹

Interestingly, American Evangelicals, besides finding common grounds with conservative Catholics on a range of social issues, admitted the growing influence of American Catholics on the US political thought and practice. Three Supreme Court justices including the Chief Justice, and the current Vice-President Joe Biden are Catholics. Catholic Church is now more attractive to younger Evangelicals. Reconciliation between Evangelicals and Catholics reflects the wider rapprochement between Christians around the world.⁶⁰

In 1990s, many Evangelical churches allied with Catholic churches on the issue of abortion. They bombed abortion clinics, shot doctors and are still doing so. However, due to a big backlash against that they changed their strategy and resorted to legal grounds to stop abortion. With the support of political leadership, they are trying to bring their

representatives in Law Department who have obtained their degrees from the religious institutions that are not recognized.⁶¹

The present high level of activity by Evangelicals in the US political scene is a change from the early 20th century when Evangelicals had distanced themselves from politics due to their fundamentalism. Therefore, Evangelicalism matured and changed since 1950. They became more politically active, more ecumenical (unity between churches) and finally more internationally minded.⁶²

Holy Alliance: Evangelicals, Republican Party & Neo –Conservatives:

Evangelicals never retreated from public squares since 1960s and 1970s. They approached the political elites including Neo-Conservatives (Neo-Cons), and entered in an alliance with them thus complimenting each other.

3. Evangelicals and the Republican Party

In US, there are two major political parties, the Republican Party and the Democrats. The Republican Party officially held position is on laissez faire economy, low taxes and social conservative policies. Therefore, Republicans could serve Evangelicals' agenda better than the Democrats. With their rise in the US, Evangelicals provided an inspiration to the emerging political system of the US. They formed the backbone of Whig Party, which gave birth to the Republican Party. The Anti-Masonic Party, which held the first presidential nominating convention in 1831, was both an Evangelical reform movement and a political party.⁶³

Evangelicals attempted to use politics to restore nation's Christian identity. They reached Republican Party and were identified with them because of having similar position on various issues. They established contacts with President Dwight Eisenhower and Vice-President Richard Nixon. However, due to their lack of political skills, they could not exercise controlling influence on the Republican Party in the first phase of the formation of alliance from 1940s through 1960s. It was the succeeding years that they were able to control Republican Party.⁶⁴

The alliance with Evangelicals suited the Republican leadership because they had traditionally advocated conservatism in domestic and foreign policy areas. But, since they were a minority in the party, they approached Evangelicals and entered into a holy alliance known as the New Right, with them. Then onwards, from Truman to George W. Bush, Evangelicals have approached every President of the US on matters of domestic and foreign policy making.⁶⁵ It might be in this context that Senator Danforth from Missouri said, 'I do not fault religious people for their political actions. The problem is not with people or with churches. The problem is with a party that has gone so far in adopting a sectarian agenda that it has become the political extension of a religious movement.'⁶⁶

Evangelicals voting bloc has had a remarkable impact on elections and religious affiliation is always the best predictor even though, in some cases, its effect is little.⁶⁷ Because of their superiority in wealth and education than the mainline Protestants by 1970s, Evangelicals believed in their voting power to change national politics. The South was a stronghold of the Democrats till 1970s, however, the Republicans, by adopting a cultural war rhetoric and more conservative position on abortion and other cultural issues, were able to attract votes in the 'Bible Belt'. The Republican Party became increasingly dependent on its Evangelicals constituency, as they accounted for one-third of Republican vote in presidential election at the time when Bush junior took office. But the political power could not produce substantial

legislative gains as at the end of Bush presidency abortion and same sex marriage were still legal but school prayer was not. As more Americans were supportive of these issues, Evangelicals found that they could win elections but not change the culture.⁶⁸

The PEW Forum conducted a survey in 2007, showing the Evangelical Churches affiliation towards Republican Party as 38%.⁶⁹ Certainly, disagreement among scholars exists who believe that the trend in party affiliation among Evangelical churches is gradually changing. A survey of PEW Research Center suggests that the number of 55% of White Evangelicals aged 18 to 29 identified themselves as Republicans in 2001 but by 2007, the number reduced to 40%. However, that does not mean that they are turning into liberal Democrats, but they are more loosely linked to the Republican Party.⁷⁰ There is also a change in voting trend because in 2008 primaries, a third of white Evangelicals voted for Democrats.⁷¹ However, it is argued; ‘despite using their influence together with electoral pressure, Evangelicals neither possess an uneven influence on the US government nor is their agenda necessarily cohesive and uniform’.⁷²

In this scenario, it is held that the foreign policy making does not rest solely with the US presidents or their administration, but the Congress plays a big role and passes resolutions that give the president his powers. Religion plays a role when political leaders go to their constituencies for votes. The Congressmen keep in mind the wishes of their constituencies who, in turn, hold the power to reelect them. That, consequently, is where and how religion plays role in politics.⁷³

4. Evangelicals and the Neo-Cons

Neo-Cons appeared on the political scene in the 1960s with three common themes. Firstly, that the issues of ‘good and evil’ should be at the core of US foreign policy and that the US possesses moral superiority. Secondly, they believe that the military strength determines the relationship between nations and supports the unilateralism of the US. Finally, they see the Middle East as a key focus of US interest abroad.⁷⁴

This relationship can be explained as: ‘the Neo-Cons pursue their goals of Evangelization by military means if needed, whereas Evangelicals believe in preaching and see the world through a window like God would see the world.⁷⁵ Neo-Cons are passionate about ideas and rely on the military to impose these ideas. They mirror image, which can be explained as American Exceptionalism.⁷⁶

Regarding their role in politics, it is argued that Neo-Cons undertook the articulation of Republican foreign policies.⁷⁷ They knew how to identify and destroy enemy while fighting Nazism, Communism and Islamic fundamentalism and came up with policies in which military force was the first resort and not the last.⁷⁸ Both Evangelicals and Neo-Cons strongly supported fighting Communism. They continued with their support against Communism, as they wanted to increase the security of the US from those who threatened it.⁷⁹ Therefore, different lobbies and Neo-cons aligned themselves with Christian Right to achieve their respective goals that, at some point, converged as well.

Evangelicals, Foreign Policy & the US Presidents:

The US has a highly structured and well-instituted civil religion. Civil religion binds people together giving them an overall sense of spirituality. The presidents of the US have served as the prophets and priests of this civil religion, using it to unite citizens and for winning their support for specific policies. Almost all the US presidents have referred to divine providence

in their inaugural speeches and frequently asserted that US is a nation chosen and blessed by God.⁸⁰

There was nothing unusual in a US president describing the nation's role in the world in religious terms. In his inaugural address, the second President of the US John Quincy Adams (1825-1829) thanked an overruling Providence that had so protected his country from the beginning.⁸¹ Americans are accustomed to the frequent use of religious language by their presidents, especially when discussing foreign affairs or security policy.

Mead (2001) view US strategy as shaped by the convergence of several distinct schools of thought that compete for dominance in foreign policy issues. He associates four approaches with four personalities; Alexander Hamilton and his protectionist attitude towards Commerce, President Thomas Jefferson and the maintenance of US democratic system, President Andrew Jackson advocacy of the populist values and military might and President Woodrow Wilson and his overriding sense of moral principles.⁸² This explains the US foreign policy division into four traditions; Hamiltonianism, Jeffersonianism, Jacksonianism and Wilsonianism. Of these Wilsonianism is based upon religiously infused moralism and President George W. Bush among other presidents fits into this tradition. The Iraq war and the administration's support for Israel are two of its unmistakable examples.⁸³

After 1970s, Evangelicals were able to bring one kind of Evangelical into the White House who replaced another kind. Jimmy Carter John Anderson, presidential candidate in 1980 and Ronald Reagan, all were 'Born Again' and witnessing Evangelicals and had the support of Evangelicals.⁸⁴ Since Jimmy Carter's era, Evangelicals have increasingly occupied high offices in the federal, state and local governments.⁸⁵ Carter, like also used religion in his election campaigns and promised that he would appoint qualified Evangelicals in the Federal government.⁸⁶ Though, he went back on his promises and as a result could not achieve their support in the next elections.

Similarly, George Herbert Walker Bush had gained support of the Evangelicals during his 1988 presidential campaign. However, both Evangelicals and Bush senior were suspicious of each other.⁸⁷ In the same manner Reagan, who aimed to protect and promote US supremacy, gained the support of Evangelicals in his election campaigns.

A similarity can be viewed between the foreign policy vision of President Ronald Reagan and Bush junior. Many works suggest that the foreign policy direction of Bush administration was set as much by ideology as by the actual conjunctures of international affairs.⁸⁸ During the Cold War, Reagan in a religious lens denounced the Soviet Union as an Evil Empire. He said: 'Americans are urged by Scripture and the Lord Jesus to oppose sin and evil present in the world with all their might'. Likewise, George W. Bush thought himself to be called for the mission by God and in his National Security Strategy asked for a crusade against 'evil'. The 2002 National Security Strategy affirmed the war on Iraq as their responsibility to get rid of the 'evil'.

The moral role of presidents increased their popularity among religious conservatives in the US. According to a Gallup survey (1992 - 98), 70% people in the South said that religion was important in their lives. Their number increased so much that by 2000 they saw George W. Bush as 'one of us' who did more than any other president in putting forward the Evangelicals' agenda and, in return, provided him the most solid base. Not only various American circles but also Europeans saw the Bush theocratic presidency as unfavourable.⁸⁹

Evangelicals, Israel & Islamophobia:

Israel has a religious importance for Evangelicals; hence it has a special place in US foreign policy. Interestingly, Israel has the same importance for Muslims as it has for Evangelicals. Israel is such an offence to the Muslim world, especially since the Israeli government reclaimed Jerusalem as their eternal capital. It lies behind the declared radical intention to drive Israel into the sea and the widespread loathing of Americans for their support to Israel, enabling her to stay in her promised land.⁹⁰ Many in the Muslim world see US policies as hostile towards them. There are many quarters of the Western society that include academia (religious as well as secular scholars) who disagree with the US foreign policy towards the Muslim world vis-a'-vis Israel and the way it is addressing the global WoT.

Due to Evangelical support for Israel and because of Israel's relations with the Muslim world, Islam has been marginalized and stereotyped. Consequently, the quagmire of bloodshed in the name of religion and religious identity continues and it is not limited to one place at present. Viorst noted that the war between Israel and Palestinians is causing regional instability and is a hurdle to any hope of reconciliation between the West and Islam.⁹¹

5. Religious Importance of Israel

History bears witness that the US has a strong bond with Israel since its birth and has influenced US politics. Unger puts it in these words:

"The notion of America as the new Israel was so strong that on September 7, 1774 . . . George Washington attended the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia and heard an Episcopal priest read Psalm 35, clearly suggesting that Americans, like Jews, had earned the right to be called God's Chosen People, and that God would fight for America just as he had fought for Israel."⁹²

Israel was created on May 12, 1948 on the basis of a Zionist ideology because of the support and role played by the Jewish lobby inside the US, which influenced Harry S. Truman to recognize Israel within eleven minutes of the declaration of independence.⁹³ The support shown by Truman was probably based on and is often referred to as Christian Zionism, the belief that the return of Jews to the Holy Land is in accordance with Biblical prophecy. Many theologians referred to the US as the American Israel.⁹⁴ It was by the 1960s that many Evangelicals were interpreting news from the Middle East through prophetic lenses.⁹⁵

Another explanation is that, 'the challenge with Dispensationalist Evangelicals is that they politicize their churches for religious reasons of Israel. They do not care as much about Israel as they do about its religious importance, as it is where the Armageddon will happen. So, in the end they will be able to evangelize all the Jews.'⁹⁶ To this aspect of Christian Zionism, Jews also are wary of Christian Zionists whose aim is to convert them and consider their support to be doing more harm than good because they are making peace initiative in the Middle East difficult. Additionally, many churches and Christian organizations also criticize the role played by Christian Zionists.⁹⁷

The pro-Israel Christian Right in the US is very strong and they vehemently oppose all those who criticize Israel or defend Palestine.⁹⁸ Therefore, the members of the Congress and the Administration have to listen to the lobbyist and interest groups than to their constituencies,⁹⁹ among which is American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) a pro-Israel lobby. AIPAC dictates Congressional policies relating to the Arab-Israel conflict. It,

along with a few allies, has shaped Congress in a way that no Congressman can dare to speak against or criticize the pro-Israel policy.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, AIPAC has the support of Evangelicals leaders like Gary Bauer, Jerry Falwell, Ralph Reed and Pat Robertson and former majority leaders in the House of Representatives, Dick Armey and Tom DeLay.¹⁰¹

Nonetheless, majority of Evangelicals defend Israel, the minority of them is trying to take a balanced approach¹⁰² and support a two state solution for Israel. Today, certain strains of fundamentalism still carry on as Dispensationalist Evangelical still support Israel. The difference is that now Evangelicals are deeply engaged in politics on that issue and many others.¹⁰³ Now there are programs that bring American Evangelicals to Israel and Palestine to show them the harsh realities of Palestinian life and to encourage them to speak out for a just solution, one that does not favor Israel.¹⁰⁴

During Bush period, Neo-Cons such as Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Pearle and others in government and Congress designed a game plan called 'New American Century' a doctrine that has much to do with support to Israel and potential regime change in the Middle East. Many Neo-Cons are Jews who support Israel for political reasons whereas Evangelicals support it for religious reason.¹⁰⁵ The Neo-Cons had their colleagues in the State Department including John R. Bolton, David Wurmser and Elliot Cohen supporting their colleagues at the Pentagon.¹⁰⁶

6. Islamophobia

The theological connections between Islam and the apocalypse have deep historical roots in the US history. After 9/11, the focus on Muslims may have made the interpretations of Biblical prophecy more common. So, 9/11 certainly did not initiate American Evangelicals' reflections on Islam, or their speculations about the role of Muslims in the End Times. For example, the writings of 18th century Evangelical theologian, pastor Jonathan Edwards, reflect these thoughts when he wrote that Roman Catholicism and Islam would both meet an abrupt end in the last days.¹⁰⁷

The Evangelicals idea about the 'End Time' is that 'God will defeat the Middle Eastern Muslim nations just as they rise up to attack Israel in the last days reveals their views about Islam and the Muslims. Since September 11, 2001, some conservative writers even suggested that the Antichrist would be a Muslim.'¹⁰⁸

It can be argued that these feelings towards Muslims have been there since the colonial era.¹⁰⁹ While the colonial Americans discussed Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the 17th century Americans still lived mentally in a European world and were keenly aware of the challenges presented by Islam in terms of military and the spread of Muslim religious influence. Therefore, Conservative American Christians have always placed Muslims in a critical role in Armageddon.¹¹⁰ Infact, the hostility appears in different manifestations, as M. J. Akbar examines: 'the West's next conflict is certainly going to come from the Muslim world.'¹¹¹ However, some scholars term this conflict as not between Islam and the West but between the fundamentalists in Muslim, Christian, Jewish and modern world.¹¹²

According to McMahon, Evangelicals having a very negative view about Islam see the WoT, the war in Iraq, and the struggle against religious persecution as a part of general foreign policy thrust to challenge radical Islam.¹¹³ A survey based on national sample of leaders of Evangelical organizations, ranging from churches and missionary associations to relief agencies and political groups, was conducted in the fall of 2002. On April 7, 2003 results were released which showed the overall view of Islam as, 13% favoured, 10% were neutral

whereas 70% were unfavourable to Islam. As far as their opinions on evangelizing Muslims is concerned, 81% were of the view that Muslims abroad should be evangelized, 16% gave it some importance and 03% did not think it to be very important.¹¹⁴

As the Evangelicals sought to influence US foreign policy with regard to the Middle East, the 'Left Behind series by Tim Lahaye and Jerry Jenkins have injected a faith into the US government to fulfill the Biblical prophecy. Their Agenda calls for a war against Islam.¹¹⁵ The hate speeches of Christian Zionists and hardline preachers against Muslims attracted media attention. Evangelicals like Rod Parsley, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and John Hagee have demonized Islam, not only through their followers but also from their close connections with President Bush and his administration. Therefore, many in the Muslim world and in Europe were sure that religion was an important factor in the US foreign policy.¹¹⁶

After 9/11, President Bush remark at the White House was alarming when he termed WoT as Crusade.¹¹⁷ Later on, he corrected the word crusade as it sent a wrong message to the Muslim world, and by praising Islam he stated that the WoT is against the terrorists and not against the Muslims. General William (Jerry) Boykin, the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Intelligence under Bush frequently argued that America was destined to win the war against Islam because his God was bigger than that of Islam's followers.¹¹⁸ However, the Bush administration distanced itself from these anti-Islamic statements stating that it is their personal opinion and maintained its public stance on Islam as a religion of peace. It is argued that the US administration including that of the Bush did not have any problem with the Muslim world, but the Congress, on the other hand, had.¹¹⁹

International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA):

An important development in Evangelicals' activism was the success in getting the IRF Act of 1998 passed that declared 'freedom of religion and conscience' a top objective of US foreign policy.¹²⁰ Besides that, IRF works for issues such as environment, human rights and democracy including religious freedom, religious persecution and discrimination worldwide and recommends and implements policies in other countries to develop programs through the State Department.¹²¹ The Law is criticized in the US for its ineffectiveness and abroad as an interventionist policy by the US. There are also concerns in the Muslim world that it is aimed at interfering in the internal affairs of Muslim states.

Evangelicals and President Bush:

This research takes an in depth evaluation of President Bush foreign policy as 9/11 and the subsequent events have changed the international scenario. When President Bush took charge of the office, 'he guaranteed to follow the line of Evangelicals. After 9/11, his personal religiosity had a marked effect on US foreign policy'.¹²² During and after his election campaign, Bush's speeches went beyond his predecessors in the sheer number of references to God.¹²³ Albright quotes him as, 'God wants me to be the President. At some point we may be the only ones left, which ok with me because we are America'.¹²⁴

Besides appointing a large number of Evangelical stalwarts, the White House also appointed a liaison to Evangelicals and made legislations acceptable to them, under Bush. It made possible for them to influence the policy process and, so they began to generate significant results.¹²⁵ Bush appointed John Ashcroft as his Attorney General, Condoleezza Rice, served as National Security Advisor in his first term and as Secretary of State in the second. She talked about her faith in Evangelical churches and occasionally led office prayers. He

appointed a pro-life candidate as Secretary of Health and Human Services, Rod Paige as Secretary of Education. Above all was the president himself who frequently discussed his faith and Born Again conversion experience with Evangelicals.¹²⁶

As a result, in 2004, self-identified Evangelicals provided around 40% of Bush's total votes. By playing a major role in Congressional and Senate elections, the number of self identified Evangelicals in Congress increased from around 10% of the membership in both Houses in 1970 to more than 25% in 2004.¹²⁷ Furthermore, Bush appointed Evangelicals to the Department of Justice who were graduates of the Christian law schools, which were not accredited law schools. Supreme Court and State Judiciary have many of them but removing them is difficult as that would look like a punitive part.¹²⁸

Bush also initiated funding of the Faith-based Organizations (FBO). Because of constitutional prohibition against government establishment of religion, federal funding put restrictions on FBOs. Bush ignoring this, publicly showed support for government funding of FBOs during 2000 presidential campaign. Despite opposition, he issued two Additional Executive Orders on December 12, 2002 setting the administrative framework for the inclusion of FBOs in US foreign assistance programs.¹²⁹ Bush's divine intuition and Evangelicals strong influence became clear while taking decision of Iraq invasion when 'he did not seek his father's advice who happened to be against it'.¹³⁰ Unfortunately, it was his overreach on Iraq along with other misadventures that deprived him of the support of young white Evangelicals in his final years.¹³¹

With regard to Evangelicals influence on Bush policy towards Israel, a poll of PEW in 2003 suggests, 'American Evangelicals under Bush were influential and sympathized with Israel. But Tony Blair, US ally in the WoT, was frustrated by Bush's failure on putting pressure on Israel regarding Israel-Palestine issue. Because of such situation, it is argued that on Israel-Palestine issue Bush was less influenced by faith than by political pragmatism and Texan stubbornness.'¹³² Cromartie opines, 'despite having certain views about the Middle East, Evangelicals did not have any influence on Bush administration'.¹³³

Another view is that Bush and Neo-Cons and his administration did not base their foreign policy related to Iraq or Afghanistan on Evangelicals religious principles. There is a disconnection between what Evangelicals think about the future of Middle East in an eschatological way and what a realigned administration is thinking about when it comes to national security issues related to Iraq and Afghanistan. Therefore, the Bush administration was not consulting Evangelicals about the foreign policy.¹³⁴ The positive aspect of influence is that at present, due to Evangelicals influence, under President Bush, US aid to Africa rose by 76% including fifteen billion dollars in new spending for the programs to combat HIV and AIDS.¹³⁵ Evangelicals have also pressed the administration and the Congress to adopt a range of humanitarian and human rights initiatives.

Conclusion

Religion has played an important role in politics in the US and throughout history the relationship between religion and politics have been mixed and utilized to have an impact on society. Religion has been manipulated both by political and religious elites for their own interests.

In the US, religious belief has always had its way within the state with regard to domestic policies and in relations with other countries. Religion has been an important factor in American life and politics from the beginning. Despite the Constitutional separation of

church and state, there remained a role of religion and its manipulation in politics and even more so in presidential electoral process. All US presidents have described nations role in the world affairs in religious terms. However, the only difference has been the manner in which each president has applied religious injunctions to events.

Evangelical Christians have long believed that the US should be a nation whose political life is to be based upon and governed by their interpretation of Biblical and theological principles. They ask government to outlaw all the practices that have been termed as sins by the church, and that the legislature and courts of law should tailor their policies and laws accordingly. This demand was given due attention by almost all US presidents. Their role in foreign policy was felt more with their support and efforts for passing the IRF Act.

There are, in fact, different views of scholars on Evangelicals role and influence on US foreign policy. However, they agree on one point that they became politically active after a brief disengagement from political spheres. The reconnection this time was different because now they were concentrating on social and other issues. Evangelicals now recognize issues such as poverty, hunger, pandemics, environmental degradation and debt as major global problems, and the need for the US to respond.

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